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Two Paths to Socialism: Marcel Déat and Marceau Pivert

Donald N. Baker

The roads by which men entered and left the French Socialist party during the interwar years were as diverse as those in and out of the Christian churches. Some came to the faith by dramatic and sudden conversion, others as the result of long conditioning, still others through the influence of a charismatic or exemplary apostle. To ask why men joined the Socialist Party, what they expected of it, why they adopted certain factional orientations within the movement, and why they quit the party is fundamental to any understanding of what the party represented in interwar France. And yet these questions are very difficult to answer. Some simple statistical correlations establish the point that the party's membership increased in election years and most of all in years when it was allied with other parties (the Radicals in 1924, the Radicals and Communists in 1936), that areas of Communist membership decline in the early 1920s tended to be areas of Socialist membership growth, that in the late 1920s and early 1930s the right wing grew faster than the left wing and that in the Popular Front period the left-wing grew faster than any other sector of the party. And so on. But there is a limit to what statistical correlations can show. To get a finer-grained picture, we need the evidence provided by the lives of individual socialists.

The purpose of this article is to contribute towards that richer texture by focussing on the formative experiences in the early lives of two of the party's most renowned 'extremist' leaders – Marcel Déat, chief of the 'neo-socialist' right-wing, and Marceau Pivert, head of the 'revolutionary left'. By any measure they were interesting and important politicians. It is impossible to conceive of interwar socialism in France without taking their contributions, both negative and positive,

into account. They were the leaders of the only important ousted factions from 1921 to 1939, Déat of the activist right which emerged in the 1920s and early 1930s, Pivert of the activist left that expanded during the Popular Front period. Déat was the most original revisionist in the party's interwar ideological discussions, Pivert, the director of its 'self-defence' activities and author of many 'spontaneous' demonstrations and perhaps a few strikes too. Not only did they both influence the tone and substance of party debates, they affected its recruitment by helping to shape its image.

Déat and Pivert came to socialism by quite different processes, crossed each other's paths in their factional orientations within the socialist movement, and wound up leading extreme factions out of the Socialist Party. Déat, a socialist from his youth, began slightly to the left of centre within the party, became the leading revisionist and reformist, and, after leading the right-wing out in 1933, entered the deserts of technocratic corporatism, ending his public career as a cabinet minister in the Vichy regime. He concluded his life, it is said, as a convert to Christianity hiding in the exile afforded by an Italian monastery. Pivert, by contrast, began as a moderate nationalist, moved on to freemasonry and syndicalism, and became at first a moderate and then a radical socialist, continuing to move steadily leftward in a progress towards *anarchisant* spontaneism. His path left the edge of the Socialist Party in mid-1938, following which he attempted to create a new peasant and worker party inspired by the notion of revolutionary defeatism.

The political careers of these men are beginning to engage scholarly attention; yet so far their early careers and formative experiences have been little discussed. There are good reasons for this omission, not least of which has been the absence of adequate sources. Recently, however, the accidents of scholarly research have made available the unpublished, and probably never-to-be published, memoirs of these two men. Déat's is very long and was originally intended for publication; it was finally withheld at the family's request.[1] Pivert's, very brief, was written on his deathbed and was intended, according to his wife, only for the eyes of his family.[2] Déat's deals with his whole public career, Pivert's chiefly with the formative experiences of his early life. In consequence, they are not strictly comparable documents; they do not always provide answers to the same questions. Yet there is perhaps enough in both to permit some analysis of the dynamics of thought and action of the two men, some glimmering of the reasons for their conflicting political journeys.

The focus here, then, is not on the political actions of the two men. It is on the early and formative experiences described by them in these memoirs, that is, on their retrospective views of their early political development. Without shying away from a few comparative observations at the end, I have chosen to discuss the two men separately. The chief reason is that, since neither memoir is ever likely to become generally available, I have felt some obligation to communicate something of the flavour and substance of these documents by quoting from them rather freely and to a certain extent serially.

Déat's route to socialism appears to have been both intellectual and psychological.[3] He found Jaurèsian socialism philosophically satisfying in his early years, and very much liked the feeling of achievement and solidarity that derived from membership in socialist youth groups and party activities. The latter point comes through very clearly in his memoir, and one wishes that Déat had said more about his parents and family life than he did. As it is, we know only that he was the second son of a civil servant in the Administration de la Marine and that his parents, who were Catholic, encouraged his precocious intellectual development. However, Déat leaves the distinct impression of a man who felt a good deal of insecurity from an early age. From the time he left his family to attend the lycée Henri IV in Paris he never seems to have felt complete without entering a group that gave him a strong sense of belonging: repeatedly in his memoir one finds that what gave him greatest pleasure is the sense of community that he derived from belonging to a tight-knit class and socialist group at the lycée (and later at the Ecole Normale Supérieure), to a close, almost tribal unit in the army, and, after the war, to his entry into the adult Socialist Party, then characterized by a strong sense of community.

By his own account, Déat's early philosophical development was precocious. Born in 1890, he renounced his parents' Catholicism at the age of 12 or 13, deciding that he could not accept its mysticism. As he later admitted, this act left him with a certain taste for metaphysical and epistemological problems, perhaps – if we can read into his development – even a certain vacuum that needed to be filled. In any event, he tells us that his adolescent years were characterized by the kind of 'anguish' described by the existentialists. His first serious and informed thinking occurred when he arrived in Paris in 1912 to begin his studies at the lycée. 'Plunged into the intellectual atmosphere of Paris', surrounded by brilliant young men familiar with philosophical

fashions, and taught philosophy by the Neo-Kantian Emile Chartier (better known by his journalistic pseudonym 'Alain'), Déat undertook his first philosophical 'inventory' in order to discover just what he believed:

> I passed ceaselessly from one theme to another, going from syndicalism to socialism, to Bergsonism, to Durkheimian sociology, studying Kantian morality in its hatred of violence and its transposition of Pascalian dilemmas to the level of political efficacy.

At the age of seventeen he developed a method from his reading of Kant, a method which, he said in his memoir, 'opened up the doors of philosophical reflection':

> I quickly understood that the relation of the subject and object, which defines the mind, if one grasps the truth of it, excluded all dogmatisms, all substantialism. And I repeated to myself endlessly those elementary and protective formulas: 'No object without subject'. To which I one day added the prohibition of substantiating the very relationship between subject and object.

Looking back on these views forty years later, Déat could see their limitations easily. 'There was definitely lacking what is lacking in all forms of idealism – an identification of the dialectical movement with the existence [i.e., the objective reality] which finally delivers it from the dialectic.' 'One should add', he went on, 'that it was far more difficult' to see the weakness in 1914, given 'the limits of a classical education' and 'the university ambiance' of the time.

His concern with the dichotomy between subject and object was related to his search for a theory of action:

> My reflections were indivisibly political and philosophical . . .. At their core were these words coupled together: to think and to act, to know and to do, to understand and to decide . . . The gulf between thought and action was both wide and deep. The whole development of philosophical reflection in the nineteenth century had led to a hypertrophy of rational abstraction and of cognitive effort. Our teachers had grown up in an ambiance of exaggerated intellectualism, which had provoked a rather vigorous reaction in the form of pragmatism or Bergsonism or a return to romantic vitalism, of a blind and desperate recourse to action for its own sake *[l'action pour l'action]*. I repudiated this plunge into the irrational, which seemed to me to be the worst of abdications. I remained enamoured of clear ideas; yet I nevertheless felt the need for the concrete too. I also heard the appeals of the nearly biological social turmoils then beginning. This sound mistrust of romantic intuitions, this distrust of obscure myths, this refusal to stop at pragmatism (albeit baptized by the very intellectualist Maurras as 'organizing empiricism' *[empiricisme*

> *organisateur]*), did not prevent me from also refusing to share our fathers' naive confidence in science, alerted as we were by the nominalist doubts of such little-suspected and well-intentioned people as Henri Poincaré. I participated with curiosity but without enthusiasm in the attempts of the 'science of manners' and objective sociology to pass from the 'indicative' to the 'imperative.'

Thus, before the war, Déat was intrigued by sociology but dubious of its uses in establishing any firm guide to action. The study of social reality in orthodox sociological terms seemed to lead to circular reasoning: 'All values were inevitably relativized by knowledge, yet it was necessary to proceed to their study . . . [and] for them to remain valid.'

For a time, at any rate, Déat found the guide for which he was looking in socialism:

> It will not be surprising that the problems evoked on the level of our studies were in perpetual symbiosis with our political controversies. So it was that socialism became the glowing centre *[le centre lumineux et réchauffant]* of my reflections, of my critical efforts, of my constructive ambitions and of my enthusiasms. It was not a conversion; it was a natural and logical outcome *[aboutissement]*. All the same, it was like entering a religion . . . .

He had grave doubts, however, about Guesdist socialism, and especially about the claims of the Marxist dialectic: 'I was not very sure that the famous "dialectic", even "returned to its feet", was capable of satisfying both the need to know and the need to act . . .' Jean Jaurès, by contrast, was less dogmatic, more subtle, far more satisfying intellectually. Moreover,

> Jaurès had for me the prestige of the university. He was a *normalien.* He was a philosopher by training . . . He established a balance between idealism and materialism. He refused to see in the movement of history an automatic and blind mechanism. He did not neglect the reaction of man to his natural or social milieu or to events. He did not deny the class struggle, but he did not at all see these classes enclosed in value systems without outside interference. He wanted the proletariat to be capable not only of conquering but of convincing and its ideal to be impressed on the best parts of the bourgeoisie. This living hand-to-hand struggle became the true motor of History. A creative emulation and not a conservative obstinacy or a rage for vengeance brought the bourgeoisie and the proletariat to grips. Whence a singularly rich doctrine of the state, more flexible than the dogmatic formulas of Guesdism, took shape. An active and creative reformism was no longer distinguished from a realistic revolutionary spirit.

This was not a 'perfect synthesis', Déat knew. But it was nonetheless

'the most coherent, the strongest, the most humanly exalting system of ideas which could have been offered to us. It answered as fully to my inclinations as to my uneasiness'.

This was apparently where Déat stood philosophically when war broke out. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Déat was dismayed and outraged by the war, which took him away from the Ecole Normale Supérieure on 5 September, 1914, even before his first classes had begun. Along with his fellow *normaliens,* he was immediately chosen for a position of leadership apparently at company level. Of the four *normaliens* placed in his regiment, he was to be the only one to survive. (Of the seventy in his class at the lycée Henri IV, fewer than half were to survive.) He was from the first impressed by the random wantonness of modern warfare, by the slaughter of masses of men in which chance ordained the death of many and the survival of others. Just as his entry into the lycée Henri IV had impressed him as a stroke of fortune denied some of his talented friends, so now the fact that he was one of the lucky ones deeply impressed him: there was no logical explanation for the fact that he had been among the 250 survivors (in a regiment of 1,800) during the summer offensive of 1918.[4]

In addition to chance, what struck Déat most was the sense of community among the soldiers:

> A regiment in the trenches is like a village . . . One learns everything about the men with whom one lives. And little by little a man perceives that he is caught in a warm and closely-woven human tissue from which he no longer wishes to extricate himself . . . It is better than the family or the village, it is the tribe, the primitive 'clan', with all its powers. It is indispensable to understand what this experience signifies for us.
>
> Each company forms a small world apart, where each knows the others to the core . . . We would not tolerate boasting and bluffing. The older ones told, not without humour, some good old stories of barracks and of great manoeuvres whose details were indelibly etched in their memories, stories of such a sort that the war appeared as the serious consequence of an epoch of buffoonery.

In the trenches, he discovered, there was a 'pure communism', a denial of all the false values and selfishness that got in the way of the functioning of society. Money, hereditary place, class, political affiliation – all of these simply disappeared in a spontaneous and very functional community in which men were measured by their ability to contribute to the welfare of the group and in which generous sentiments ran freely. Bound together by 'material life', rude soldiers had found solutions to problems that had eluded the savants, and they had

done so without any intellectualizing whatever. 'In the pure state', Déat reveals, 'I finally understood sociological truth, the elementary collective mentality which is institutional but not ideological'. This he found 'a surprising discovery for a mind used to placing its emphasis on ideas, and it was also an unexpected answer to what I thought were [insurmountable] French ideological divisions. What was impossible for a reasoning, impassioned France, its soldiers had attained; they had achieved unity without doctrine.'[5]

Following the war, Déat returned to the Ecole Normale Supérieure to complete his higher education. There he studied with Célestin Bouglé, Durkheim's student and successor in the Chair of Sociology at the Sorbonne, and Léon Brunschvicg, a leading French philosopher. While a student, he came into contact with the reformist socialist, Albert Thomas, who had gathered around him a coterie of young intellectuals. Thomas was then propounding the idea that the socialists ought to organize a large coalition of radicals, trade unionists and socialists behind a programme of specific reforms. In addition to scrapping the idea of class struggle, Thomas wanted French socialists to accept the abiding reality of the nation state, abandoning their pretence that socialism was supranational, and to entrust planning to a kind of technocratic elite drawn from the working and managerial classes.[6] It appears that Déat's contacts with Bouglé, Brunschvicg, and Thomas confirmed and even helped him to articulate the lessons he claims to have derived from the war. From Bouglé, he gained an increased faith in sociology as a guide to action.[7] From Brunschvicg, he imbibed a faith in the powers of human reason and a conviction that human development was characterized by an expansion of consciousness and rationality.[8] And from Thomas, he learned that socialism does not require a conflict orientation, that the nation state is a 'fact' with which socialists must reckon, and that the only true socialism involves a 'scientifically' developed programme of reforms and an emphasis on technological skills.[9] In due course, Déat was to mould these elements, together with some of his own ideas and others borrowed from Henri de Man, André Philip, and others, into a 'neo-socialism' rooted in a scientistic faith in the social sciences and aiming at the 'socialization of the nation' by a three-stage process of 'socializing' power, profits, and – only lastly – property.[10] Bouglé, assessing this compound, invoked the memory of Saint-Simon to place it in perspective.[11]

On balance, it appears that the war did not so much alter Déat's views but rather propelled him further along the tracks that prewar neo-Kantianism, Durkheimianism, and Bergsonism had laid for him.

The war strengthened those elements in his outlook that stressed the possibility of sparking the gap between subjective awareness and objective reality. It also contributed to his belief that men could shape their own natures through institutional reform. In the end he came to believe that large consequences could flow from small acts. He was to spend the next twenty-five years of his life trying to spell out the institutional changes that 'sociological truth' indicated and to bring those changes about by adjusting existing institutions in any way – however small – that seemed to generate the right kind of consciousness. He insisted with growing urgency that the way to 'the ideal' lay through 'the possible' – and the possible, in the frame of the Third Republic, meant hundreds of petty actions rather than dramatic alterations.

In terms of his career in the socialist movement, Déat's activism and his effort to relate sociological theory to socialist doctrine led him inexorably toward the right-wing. By the late 1920s he was the outstanding revisionist and a leading figure in the reformist wing. At that point, 'the possible' for which he was agitating amounted to little more than sharing seats in an impotent cabinet with the flabby bourgeois Radicals – but Déat insisted that the simple fact of socialist participation would transform the spirit of French government, would create a new objective reality and ultimately a new awareness. Déat's revisionist efforts sparked a great debate in socialist circles, for the vision of the good society he propounded was not that of the abundant or even that of the equitable society, but rather of the harmonious society. For him, the sense of community appeared to come first. The future joys he described were not those of leisure or riches but those of peace and order, of man's reconciliation to institutions, of social solidarity.[12] Similarly, though he believed – with Turgot, Comte, Durkheim, Brunschvicg, et al. – that human progress was marked by the steady expansion of consciousness,[13] he offered no theory of history explaining the movement of objective or material necessity, with the result that his claims to understand sociological truth – itself the product of institutional or objective reality – seemed excessive. His critics, including Claude Lévi-Strauss, were quick to note the need for a 'dialectic' in his thought, and suggested that in fact Déat's arguments could lead to conservative rather than reformist or radical conclusions.[14] Furthermore, his insistence on equating 'necessity' – as indicated by sociological truth – with 'liberty' had a certain authoritarianism about it, since he delegated the key role to sociologists, who were described as 'the prophets of liberty' because they understood

what 'necessity' required.[15]

That his socialist critics were not far off the mark was indicated by Déat's career in the 1930s. With the onset of the Depression, he observed the growth of 'anticapitalism' on every hand. Its political expressions were socialism, communism, and fascism – with socialism, however, the only 'positive' expression.[16] At the same time, he was impressed by the emergence of a capitalist elite favourable to rationalization, modernization, increased productivity, consumer orientation, and the like. The 'neo-capitalist' elite – 'the Neckers of capitalism' – were objective allies of the socialists, he argued, since they were both trying to overcome the chaos of capitalism itself and preparing the way for the socialization of power and profits and property. Accordingly, he was soon arguing that the 'Neckers' ought to receive government aid in order to strengthen them while other capitalist elements were foundering.[17] He also called on the socialists to create a great 'anticapitalist' coalition that would include as many non-socialist 'anticapitalists' (i.e., peasants and the middle classes) as possible so as to deny the fascist and communist movements their support. Toward that end he proposed a programme recognizing the 'nation fact' and setting forth his three-stage process for 'socializing the nation' by democratizing power at every level (i.e., in factories and economic concerns), by socializing profits (through taxes and fiscal policies, initially), and finally by taking over large-scale property holdings. Thus, he said, the revolution could be accomplished with the unwitting aid of non-socialist anticapitalists – and peacefully, too, since by the time property was attacked the property owners would have no weapons to use against the central authority.[18] Along with this programme he insisted on the need for creating the mystique of action by drawing up a 'Plan', by taking small actions in the here-and-now, by being seen to act. It was small wonder that by mid-1933 he was drawing charges of having been bitten by the fascist virus by his colleagues and that later in the year he broke away to form a new party.[19] During Vichy, which Déat was to serve in several capacities, the search for 'the possible' moved on to a new plane.

The flaws in Déat's thought were largely those of the sociological tradition to which he belonged, and one cannot charge him with inventing them. It is not hard, however, to see that the first world war had both confirmed his membership in that tradition and fired an activism that lent his later thought a messianic quality. However, it should be noted that important stages in Déat's later political and intellectual development were also shaped by other events. Yet one is tempted to join Déat himself in seeing something of the Vichy minister

in the bright young man reflecting on sociological truth while squatting in the fetid, muck-filled trenches of the first world war.[20]

In Déat's case, the war seems to have intensified attitudes already visible in his earlier thought. In the case of Marceau Pivert, one of the leading 'revolutionary' socialists from the 1920s until the 1950s, the war was, by contrast, the point of departure for all of his later thinking. He began to reflect when misfortune befell him during the war, and his reflections – which did not mature until several years after the war – set him on a life of radical activism.

Pivert, born in 1895 in a small village in Seine-et-Marne, was the eldest son of a father who began as a farmer and ended up as the owner of a small restaurant in Nemours. As he remembered his boyhood, Pivert dwelt on his athletic prowess, he lived for soccer and was very good at it. Also a very able student, though lacking Déat's distinction, Pivert entered the Ecole d'Instituteurs in 1914, just in time to be called into the infantry. Unlike Marcel Déat, Pivert went willingly. 'I am', he wrote in his memoir, 'one of those young "heroes", more or less *manqué*, of the class of '15, . . . all afire *[tout feu, tout flamme]*, my head still crammed with chauvinism by a history teacher who dreamed only of recovering Alsace-Lorraine, ...' Sent to the trenches in Lorraine, he discovered himself '25 metres' from the German trenches, rotting arms and legs and torsoes sticking up through the dirt and mud, mortar shells blasting everything solid into smithereens. According to his account, he reacted as he had on the playing field, trying his best to be an outstanding soldier. Then, on 9 July 1915, he woke up in a hospital to find himself completely paralysed by diphtheria, the doctors so pessimistic that he was measured for a coffin. There followed months of delirium and 'years of military hospitals', at the end of which he had severely afflicted lungs and heart. Thanks to his well-conditioned body and determination, Pivert was able to recover a great deal of his vitality and mobility – to the point that he was easily the most energetic propagandist and organizer in the Socialist Party later on. In his memoir he notes with no false pride that for nearly forty years he spent about eight hours a day on socialist activities – and these after his regular day at school. To the end of his days, however, he was listed as having a 50 per cent disability by the government's pension authority.

The inner scars left by the war were equally severe. On his deathbed in 1957-58, Pivert entitled his memoir *Témoignages d'un survivant*

precisely because, as he looked back over his life, he recognized that all his adult life had been shaped by the war experience. Like Déat, he was impressed both by the sense of solidarity that grew up among men on the battlefields and by the role of fortune. However, his definitions and emphases were slightly different. Perhaps because he was actually in the trenches for less than a year, by contrast with nearly four years for Déat, Pivert was much more impressed by the generational aspect of the solidarity of fighting men rather than by the communal aspect. When he began to recuperate, he took an interest in his fellow sufferers and became active in organizing teachers, groups to assist amputees and to put pressure on the government; he also tried to establish a network of private communications with his fellow students at the Ecole Normale d'Instituteurs, only to discover the mutilation and death of many of them. The impression left on him was that of nearly an entire generation of blighted bodies and spirits. Pivert also differed from Déat in his greater emphasis on chance. While recuperating in hospital, he learned that his father had been killed in the trenches, an event which lent special meaning to a book he was reading, Richepin's *Bitter Sonnets.* A verse from it thenceforth became a kind of personal motto:

On est fils du hasard qui jeta
le spermatozoïde aveugle dans l'ovaire.

The point, he concluded, was 'as true for entry into life as for departure from it'. Thenceforth his thoughts were dominated by the role of chance:

> I am not altogether alone in this category of nearly miraculous 'survivors'. Any number of veterans ran the risk of destruction a hundred times. Why does the shell pulverize one man and leave another intact? It is chance – the word that indicates our ignorance . . .
> Yes, child of chance, both the dead and the survivor in a general massacre where the human atoms crash about obeying only the general laws of statistics, (even so, it is the youngest and best producers who are sacrificed), without one being able truly to draw from this destiny the least conclusion about the reason for it.

Pivert was never to forget the infantryman's conviction that the High Command had known roughly how many men would die in engagements, the only real questions being who specifically would do the dying. Though his earliest reflections were about the mysteries of man's destiny, in the long run this kind of thinking was to lead him to the conclusion that a particular governing system had put men in a position

where such brutal 'chance' took its toll – and thence to the further conclusion that the system needed to be overthrown.

After recovering some mobility, Pivert was returned to Paris, where his convalescence permitted him to resume his studies. While in hospital he read 'scientific philosophy' widely, – deepening his interest in mathematics and physics. Released, he began a vigorous reading programme under the tutelage of the Director of the Ecole d'Instituteurs with the aim of entering the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure at Saint-Cloud once classes resumed. About the same time he also became involved in efforts to aid amputees and other war victims – though still inspired, it appears, by a good deal of patriotism.

> The horror of war and pity for its most miserable victims were then my dominant sentiments: the desire to learn and to understand better, also. I was not yet attracted toward the militant life, though my best friend, Louis Caput, had plunged himself into it completely. The horror and the pity explain why I maintained contact, from 1917, with all of my class comrades in order to inform them of [our respective] fates; then, with an amputee, Blanchin, Director of the Ecole [Normale Supérieure (Saint-Cloud)], I created a Veteran Teachers Action Group in the Seine in order to demand an improvement in administrative programmes for amputees.[21]

This group soon merged with others being formed at all levels of the educational system to form the Fédération des Anciens Combattants de l'Enseignement, of which Pivert was made general secretary. Through the Federation he came into greater contact with radicals like Caput, men whose sense of horror and pity was attended by considerable bitterness and by a forceful rejection of official definitions of 'patriotism'. Though he was not immediately won over to their viewpoint, Pivert admits to having been influenced by them.

Following the war he entered the Ecole Normale Supérieure at Saint-Cloud, where he took classes from 1919 until 1921 – a contemporary of Déat's, both of them members of that rather special group of talented war veterans returning to civilian life. For him, too, the plunge back into an academic world involved more than mere preparation for a professional career: it was in large part a search for an explanation of what had gone wrong and how things could be improved in the future. Though his specialty was natural science, and he was absorbed completely in learning the scientific philosophy of the day, Pivert was also subjected to a good deal of philosophy, psychology, and sociology – the latter in the form of 'the sociology of religion' newly added to the Normal School's curriculum.[22] Indeed, he throve on these subjects, and studied at the Sorbonne under Bouglé and others

(Bouglé's *solidarisme* was to prove an intellectual cocktail suitable for nearly all occasions).

Politically, Pivert was still less radical in the early 1920s than his father had been on the eve of the war. His father at least had come to the point of voting socialist. Pivert, however, was still too nationalist to feel comfortable in the company of the 'defeatists' and troublemakers of the socialist left. Thus, though he says he was greatly struck by the depth of working-class discontent in the postwar period, he was still far from identifying himself personally with even the moderate elements in the socialist movement. Indeed, his political consciousness was developing along rather different lines. Having imbibed a good deal of 'scientific philosophy' and sociology, having become mildly interested, meanwhile, in the emerging syndicalist movement within the teaching profession, he had decided, in 1919, to join the League of Freemasons, then strongly 'republican', nationalist, positivistic, and, above all, anticlerical. Politically, the League was dominated by the bourgeois Radical-Socialists, with whom he still felt some affinity. Still, Pivert was to remain a freemason all his life, and did so despite the criticism of many of his later revolutionary colleagues. Freemasonry offered him something he wanted, probably a sense of fellowship transcending party and class, and a sense of mission – that of secular education – derived from high and optimistic principles. Throughout his life he was to champion freemasonry as a school in which men learned to discuss major issues rationally, in an orderly way, with respect for divergent opinions; he was also continually grateful to freemasonry for its efforts on behalf of the *école laïque,* one of his main projects. However crystal clear his revolutionary consciousness was later to become, Pivert was nonetheless 'the survivor' in need of much fellowship and the schoolteacher convinced that progress comes through reason and science.

Pivert's conversion to socialism came slowly, by stages, as a result of his own ripening reflections about the war and of experiences in the postwar period. 'It is necessary to admit', he wrote,

> that the terrible trial of the war did not immediately transform me into a revolutionary socialist. It began to ripen in me some convictions which were confirmed little by little by patient observation and trial and error. Gradually it shook off the adulterated acquisitions of a terribly nationalist education. But years and years of honest political and syndicalist work were necessary for me to attain the degree of consciousness and of international solidarity that I now consider to be a true *privilège acquis* . . . One is not born socialist; one becomes it; one becomes it a little more each year, each month, each day . . .

Unlike Déat, Pivert did not spell out very clearly the stages of his intellectual growth, so that they must remain a matter for conjecture. Indeed, he never even tells us how or why he embraced Marxism sometime during the mid-1920s. Instead, he focuses on a series of experiences that turned him into a socialist, transmuting and radicalizing his values. As we shall see, he was to lay much stress on the role of experience in creating such consciousness: it had created his own.

First, he stressed the *socialisant* atmosphere of the postwar academic world, whose impress on him he realized only later when he took his first teaching post in the provinces.[23] Among other things, while at the ENS (Saint-Cloud), he was involved in constant discussion of philosophical and political problems and came to know a number of socialists through his friend Louis Caput. If he found them misguided, he did not find them the bloodthirsty maniacs that provincial conservatives took them to be, a point he strove to make when prudence in small provincial towns dictated silence. Through the recommendation of a teacher impressed by his historical and sociological knowledge, Pivert became a research assistant to Frederic Brunet, an old 'Possibilist' socialist then writing an appeal for reformist pragmatism.[24] Brunet, one of the leading figures in Parisian city government, much impressed the young Pivert by his fusion of idealism and realism. In consequence, Pivert not only became acquainted with the history of socialism (he wrote the historical sections of the book) but began to see political problems from a more or less socialist perspective. Though he was still far from adhering to the Guesdist-dominated Socialist Party, Pivert was already beginning to think in terms of 'class', 'exploitation', and the strategies for achieving social improvement.

Secondly, beginning his teaching career in Sens (Yonne), after his graduation in 1921, he became involved in efforts to advance freemasonry and secular education in Yonne, promptly arousing local hostility by his aggressiveness. Seeing himself as a moderate and as a 'good republican' and patriot, he made the mistake of continuing to talk and act as if he were still living in student circles in Paris. In the summer of 1922 two events were particularly decisive in his development. The first was his participation in a hopeless electoral campaign against the local aristocrat, the Vicomte de Raincourt, who singled out Pivert and the candidate (another schoolteacher) as troublemakers to be kept in line. The other was the organization of a public meeting, held in the Bourse du Travail in Sens, around the theme *Refaire la République.* Pivert was still thinking in terms of making a home fit for the heroes of the war rather than of social revolution, but the nuance escaped the

dominant conservatives, whose leader, Pierre-Etienne Flandin, now joined the attacks on the 'subversives' sent out by the Ministry of Education. One of the speakers at the meeting, Michel Corday, a high navy officer who had advised government officials during the war and who was a close friend of Anatole France, made a special impression on Pivert. Corday had kept a diary during the war, and apparently he read some of the choicest passages to the throng, passages which did little to enhance the reputations of the nation's war-time leaders. In any event, when a great outcry arose against Pivert and his fellows for undermining the Republic, Pivert was quick to see that the quality of the nation's leadership had not improved since Corday's days in government.

Efforts at repression came in 1923, following the occupation of the Ruhr. Pivert was denounced as an enemy of public order and hauled before a tribunal of departmental authorities to justify himself. The charges were serious, at least in the sense that his own Inspector and the local subprefect both denounced his writing as revolutionary subversive. Though Pivert was exonerated – he had been singled out for harassment *pour encourager les autres* – he was henceforth a man with dossier, as he put it, 'marked in red ink'. Given access to his file before the tribunal met, Pivert was appalled and crushed by the fact that his own Inspector could denounce him on political grounds, an indication of cravenness he was never to forget. Immediately he feared that his own career chances had been spoiled. And, indeed, he was to be the last of those in his class to be offered an inspectorship – and then, in an obvious ploy, was offered it in the midst of one of his campaigns for the Chamber by a Minister of Education friendly to Pivert's Radical opponent. Pivert's hopes for 'a brilliant university career' were also smashed, access to the top depending upon recommendations which he could not now get. This was not a paranoiac response: several blunt discussions with superiors confirmed his suspicions. The point was driven home quickly. Told he could no longer teach in Sens, he was offered a post in a secondary school in a little mountain village in the Jura mountains – so far from Paris that he would be unable to continue his graduate work at the Sorbonne, a clear move to bury him in provincial obscurity. Rather than accept that – the only alternative given him – Pivert abandoned secondary teaching altogether in favour of a primary school in Paris, a position he held until 1939. (After 1945 he was to return to secondary education teaching, but by then the growth of the teachers' union movement offered considerable protection against arbitrariness.)

This soul-searing experience proved decisive in Pivert's life. Suddenly

he realized that the bourgeois Republic was not entirely the Republic that he had imagined it to be. As he later put it,

> I was truly 'marked by red ink' and this led me quite naturally to consider the syndicalist and political organization of [the working] class as a necessity imposed by the very laws functioning in capitalist society.

Accordingly, he threw himself passionately into political and syndicalist work. He joined the Socialist Party and with his old friends in Yonne reconstituted the Socialist *fédération* there, serving as its spokesman in the national council meeting of November 1924; he became a leading organizer of primary school teachers, and one of the founders of the Syndicat National d'Instituteurs (SNI); he became a key figure in the Ligue Français de l'Enseignement and similar organizations; and the founder of the Comité Pour l'Ecole Unique which included '43 democratic organizations', and so on:

> . . . all that simply because I had discovered little by little that the collective organization of workers in 'a combative party of class and revolution' was an absolute necessity because the injustices which torture this or that individual – whether a metaphysical anxiety or a phenomenon of some other order, or his evident alienation in the face of the monstrous mechanisms which embroil him in war or in tyranny – are in fact only the partial expressions of an immense alienation which deprives the most numerous and the poorest class of the fruit of its labour – which is to say of true material and spiritual liberty.

He went on to thank 'the P.-E. Flandins and Vicomtes de Raincourt for having helped me to discover this supreme law of our modern collective life'.

Having discovered that truth, Pivert seems to have embraced all the simplistic Marxist and syndicalist assumptions prevailing within the organizations he joined. He was never an impressively consistent thinker. Alienation more than thought seems to have propelled him toward the left wing side of both the syndicalist and socialist movements. It was perhaps significant that his own entry into socialist politics in Paris came just before the party's growing disillusion with the *Cartel des Gauches,* for that disillusion made it easy for him to associate with the left wingers rather than the right wingers who were desperately striving to revive the *Cartel.* His thought, as it matured, reflected his earlier experience. As he wrote in retrospect,

> There is no need to appeal to dialectical materialism to observe that the positive realization of justice is the result of a series of negations of justice. In the Christian idea there appeared the negation of Roman law; in the

> communal charters of the Middle Ages there appeared the negations and limitations of the right of conquest; and the juridical system established by the bourgeois revolution was the negation of feudal law.

And so, of course, Pivert's own victimization had generated a socialist consciousness in him, the transformation of a sense of grievance into a higher notion of justice.

In considering Pivert's later intellectual development, or at any rate his formulation of socialist ideology, it is interesting to compare him with Déat. For, like Déat, he was more influenced by Durkheimian sociology, Bergsonian philosophy, and Neo-Kantian categories than he ever realized. His thought was dominated by the distinction between the subjective and the objective, though in different ways from Déat's. Where Déat stressed the creative possibilities of the subjective, implying that man's mind could in a sense get ahead of the objective material universe, Pivert stressed the lag of consciousness behind material reality and the need for sparking the gap between the two.[25] Like Rosa Luxemburg Pivert saw revolutionary potential in the shock of recognition that would attend the full realization of the real state of affairs.[26] Things were always worse than they seemed. Thus, where Déat wished to improve mankind by subjective manipulation of objective reality, Pivert set himself the task of improving mankind by manipulating man's consciousness. Why the difference between the two men? Can it be explained in terms of their divergent experiences, of their different intellectual positions at the onset of the war and of the ways in which they became politically conscious? In Pivert's case, at least, one is tempted to speculate that his own shattering experiences, beginning with the war, played some role in his ideological preferences.

Pivert was never a very orthodox Marxist, though he generally used Guesdist language without reservation. His flexibility was shown during the early 1930s in response to the fascist menace. Trying to find a theoretical way to justify a large-scale antifascist movement, he concluded that 'psychological states' can motivate the masses along with material necessity.[27] And these psychological states, he believed, could be created by the political action of a small, conscious, but dedicated minority. Though enthusiastic activists alone might not create a revolution one could probably create sufficient 'democratic' enthusiasm, especially in the peasantry and lesser bourgeoisie, to stave off the fascist menace. In time the qualifications tended to get lost, and one gets the distinct impression that Pivert arrived at rather Blanquist conclusions: a revolutionary minority could actually bring off the revolution.[28] It is interesting to remember Déat's thought on this

point, for Déat had also come to the conclusion, as we have seen, that a large-scale antifascist movement could be created by a dedicated and conscious minority out of non-socialist but anticapitalist elements. However, while Déat placed his hopes in a 'plan of action' aimed at maintaining the material well-being of those elements above the level of brutalization at which fascism became attractive, Pivert increasingly put his faith in action for its own sake.

Pivert's renunciation of patriotism was to prove his most dramatic *volte face*. Just when he embraced the doctrine of revolutionary defeatism is unclear, though it certainly happened well before the Socialist congress of 1931, when he served as the left-wing's spokesman on the point.[29] In all likelihood it came in 1925 or 1926, when he became a leading syndicalist organizer among school teachers, for one of the bases on which the SNI rested was militant opposition to war credits, national defence, and official patriotism. As Déat came increasingly to believe that practical necessity required recognition of the nation-state and action within its framework, so Pivert seems increasingly to have become convinced that so long as men were divided by nation-states, so long as their value systems and institutions were shaped within that framework, no real progress was possible. Man would remain victimized, if only by his own provincial prejudices.[30]

In view of Pivert's background, it is perhaps not surprising that he should have moved steadily to the left in the interwar decades, nor that during the 1930s he should have become the Socialist Party's leading 'revolutionary' and 'pacifist'. Nor is it surprising that he hoped to achieve his own ends by shocking his countrymen into full consciousness, and that his favourite tactics were consequently protest tactics rather than seriously subversive ones. Interestingly, like Déat, Pivert was to find that the internal dynamics of his own political development were to lead him beyond the fringe of the Socialist Party. In June 1938, following the involvement of his faction in a strike aimed at the second Blum government, he was ousted from the party. He spent the rest of the prewar period trying desperately to create a new party, the Parti Socialiste Ouvrier et Paysan (PSOP), and a new revolutionary-defeatist International.[31] When the second world war broke out, Pivert happened to be attending a conference in the United States. Declared persona non grata the day war began, he was able to return to France only in 1945, when he was 'reintegrated' into the Socialist Party and became one of its more or less venerable *enragés* until he broke with it again over the Algerian War. He died just a few days before Charles de Gaulle came to power in June 1958.

That the first world war made an impact on Marcel Déat and Marceau Pivert was clear to themselves. Both saw it as a formative experience. Both tried to derive lessons from it with a view to preventing another such catastrophe; both were affected by it in their thinking about man and society. That the war pushed Déat in one intellectual direction and Pivert in another is, given the fact that they are really our only sources on the matter, an educated guess rather than a statement of incontrovertible fact. It is certain, however, that both emerged from the war brooding about the role of chance and the nature of community, and particularly about human fortunes within specific social frameworks. It is striking that the war seems to have affected them differently, sending Déat in a search for community that led him through socialism to the corporatist right, and turning Pivert from a mildly progressive nationalist into a revolutionary internationalist. At the risk of considerable oversimplification, one might conclude that while Déat tended to stress community more than chance in his later thinking, Pivert, with his belief in activist effervescence, tended to stress chance – seen as blind atoms crashing about in fixed frames – rather than community.

Yet for much of their lives Déat and Pivert were not so far apart as one might expect. They shared many assumptions in common, only emphasizing the elements slightly differently. They were, for example, united in their advocacy of the *école unique,* a public, secular educational system with a technocratic orientation in which students of all classes would be encouraged to develop their talents to the utmost of their abilities. For both men, the critical question was that of shaping man's consciousness, of liberating him from the restraints of class, religion, and prejudice, of awakening man to his own creative possibilities.[32] This concern was typical of both men. They were inspired by a high and generous idealism, sincerely concerned to lay the foundations of an egalitarian future. They belonged to the optimistic school of radical social thought generated by the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on progress through consciousness and its paradoxical belief that man can liberate himself by understanding the laws that govern his behaviour. Perhaps it can also be said that they also represented the declining phase of that faith. For, by the 1930s, they both exhibited a feverish activism that belied their claims to have uncovered the principles operative in human affairs. Pivert fell into a mystical activism in which he presumed that he was somehow jolting consciousness along, while Déat became so concerned with improving material reality that he began to accommodate himself to the existing order. The one lapsed into the cultivation of the subjective for its own

sake, the other into a nurturing of the objectively possible for its own sake: and both wound up on the fringes of French politics.

In concluding this look at some aspect of their careers, it is perhaps best to invoke the dictum that both repeatedly asserted: only those lives dedicated to realizing an ideal can be counted worthwhile, as fully human. So far as their dedications to ideals was concerned, in terms of the sacrifices they made for them, both men can be said to have lived up to their own measure. The pity is that, perhaps because of the first world war and its aftermath, they both came to mistake means for ends and action for achievement.

NOTES

1. Marcel Déat, *Mémoires Politiques* (two typescript volumes, n.d.). The first volume is entitled 'Le Massacre des Possibles', the second, 'La Poursuite des Possibles'. The first covers his life until 1940 and the second his life during the second world war. Originally intended for publication, the text remains at a fairly general level, with pages of material on general world and French conditions; it now exists in what is an obviously edited version. All quotations from Déat in this text are from the first volume, unless otherwise noted. Madame Déat kindly gave her permission for me to read the memoir and to quote from it.

2. Marceau Pivert, *Témoignages d'un Survivant* (typescript 1957-58). This memoir is discursive, brief (21 pages of single-spaced typescript), and personal. It was apparently intended for his grandchildren and was written while Pivert was on his death-bed. Madame Pivert graciously gave me permission to quote from it and talked freely and at length with me concerning her husband's career.

3. There is presently one published biography of Déat, written by his friend, Georges Albertini under the pseudonym Claude Varennes, *Le Destin de Marcel Déat* (Paris 1948). It is notably slender in its treatment of Déat before the mid-1930s. Only one published thesis considers Déat's early career: Emily Goodman, *The Socialism of Marcel Déat* (Ph.D. Thesis, Stanford University 1973).

4. In words hauntingly similar to those quoted below from Marceau Pivert's memoir, he added: 'Nous l'avons dit souvent, nous autres, les survivants du hasard, les rescapés de l'invraisemblable, en songeant à tant de morts, nos contemporains et nos frères . . .' The figures cited in the text are Déat's.

5. Déat added that the solidarity actually crossed battle lines: 'Il y avait

entre les deux infanteries une espèce de communauté de destin, que ne nous conduisit jamais à aucune "fraternisation", mais qui nous protégeait contre les poncifs haineux, contre les slogans de propaganda, et nous commendait d'avance la Justice, la modération, nous interdisait de transformer le combat en boucherie.'

6. On Albert Thomas' activities in the immediate post-war period, in so far as they bore on the French socialists, see Barthélémy Montagnon, *De Jaurès à De Gaulle: Néo-capitalisme?* (Paris 1969), 41-61. Montagnon, who was also under Thomas' spell at that juncture, founded a union of managerial employees known by the acronym USTICA.

7. Bouglé published a good deal, though mostly works of *haute vulgarisation;* his major sociological contribution was *Essais sur le régime des castes* (Paris 1927). His general views can be found most succinctly expressed in *Bilan de la sociologie française contemporaine* (Paris 1938), a work defending and developing Durkheim's thought. Bouglé believed that 'for Durkheim' – and therefore all sociologists – 'values are *objective* because *imperative,* and imperative because *collective*', an argument which profoundly impressed Déat. C. Bouglé, *The Evolution of Values,* (New York 1926), 17.

8. It is my impression that Déat learned to view Descartes, Pascal, Spinoza, Kant and others through the eyes of Brunschvicg, another prolific publisher. Déat was particularly impressed by Brunschvicg's *Le Progrès de la Conscience dans la philosophie occidentale* (Paris 1921).

9. Varennes, op. cit., 8.

10. Marcel Déat, *Perspectives Socialistes* (Paris 1930).

11. C. Bouglé, *Socialismes français, du 'socialisme utopique' à la 'démocratie industrielle'* (Paris 1932), 110.

12. His views can be charted in *La Vie Socialiste,* the organ of the Socialist Party's right-wing; his vision of the future was expressed in the conclusion to *Perspectives Socialistes.*

13. He deals most fully with this subject in his *Sociologie* (Paris 1925), in which he tries to establish sociology as more than a new 'metaphysics', a new speculation about reality; sociology, he declared, is the subjective, conscious expression of reality itself; it is not a subjective reflection of an objective reality out there somewhere, but an objective fact in its own right (on the role of the unconscious in his theorizing – obviously a puzzling element – see his article, 'La Démonstration par l'Absurde en Psychologie et en Morale' in *Revue Philosophique,* **LXXXXVII** (1924), 140-47).

14. See the critiques of *Perspectives Socialistes* by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jean Zyromski, leader of the Socialist Party's left-wing, in *L'Etudiant Socialiste,* March 1931, 1-2, 14-15.

15. In the last chapter of *Sociologie,* entitled 'Sociology and Action', Déat concludes with a distinction between 'objective' sociologists who merely describe the world as it is and the 'normative' sociologists who concentrate on the 'ideal' implicit in the 'real', on the future straining to be born. He then equates the 'ideal' to 'necessity', and 'necessity' to 'liberty'.

16. There is a penetrating analysis of Déat's intellectual development from 1930 forward in Jean-Jacques Montel, *Marcel Déat: L'Evolution d'un Néo-Socialiste* (Mémoire, University of Paris 1961). Also see the able discussion in Stanley Grossman, *Neo-Socialism: A Study in Political Metamorphosis* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1969).

17. *Le Travail de la Marne,* 9 January 1932.

18. *Perspectives Socialistes.*

19. John T. Marcus, *French Socialism in the Crisis Years, 1933-1936: Fascism and the French Left* (New York 1958), 21-33.

20. For example Déat's comments on his war experiences in *L'Oeuvre,* 3 March 1941 and 9 February 1944.

21. Through this group he became involved in the Compagnons de l'Université, who did much to influence educational reform in France. See John E. Talbott, *The Politics of Educational Reform in France, 1918-1940* (Princeton, NJ 1969).

22. In fact, according to Bouglé, Director of the Ecole Normale Supérieure during the 1930s, the new sociological curriculum was rather broader: *'La Réligion, la Science, et l'Art au point de vue sociologique'.* Bouglé, op. cit., 163.

23. In his autobiography he adds a remark indicating a somewhat different reaction from Déat to the close familiarity of school life: 'J'ai conservé de Saint-Cloud un souvenir reconnaissant à l'égard de presque tous mes professeurs et camarades – en dépit de mes démêlés avec la direction, qui admettait difficilement mon activité "profanc" extérieure dès cette époque-là, et qui s'en tenait un peu trop à une conception séminariste de l'Ecole.'

24. Frederic Brunet, *Le Socialisme expérimental* (Paris 1924).

25. Unlike Déat, Pivert did not publish explicitly on such philosophical points. One has to glean his assumptions from his scores of speeches, newspaper articles, and pamphlets. For especially useful works in this regard, see Marceau Pivert, *L'Eglise et l'Ecole, Perspectives Prolétariennes* (Paris 1932), *Ce qui doit être l'Ecole Unique* (Paris 1927) and *Pour une Politique de Classe, Par un Parti de Classe* (Paris 1937).

26. When Pivert's faction created its own publication series, it was entitled 'Spartacus', and one of its feature numbers was Luxemburg's *La Révolution Russe* (Paris 1937). However, I do not recall ever seeing an allusion to Luxemburg in Pivert's writings.

27. On the role of 'psychological states', see Pivert, speech delivered to the XXX National Congress of the Socialist Party, held in Paris on 14, 15, 16 and 17 July 1933. *Compte-rendu sténographique* (Paris 1933), 409-10.

28. Pivert, *Pour une Politique de Classe . . .,* op. cit., 19, 23.

29. SFIO, XXVIIII National Congress, *CRS* (1931), 302-09.

30. For example, Marceau Pivert, *La Révolution avant la Guerre* (Paris 1935).

31. On Pivert's career during the 1930s see Daniel Guérin, *Front Populaire, Revolution Manquée* (Paris 1963); Nathanael Greene, *Crisis and Decline: The French Socialist Party in the Popular Front Era* (Ithaca 1969), 55-65 and passim; and Donald N. Baker, *Revolutionism in the French Socialist Party (SFIO): The Left-Wing 'Tendances', 1921-1939* (Ph.D. Thesis, Stanford University 1965), where Pivert's career is treated in depth; see also my article, 'The Politics of Protest in France: the Role of the Left Wing of the Socialist Party, 1921-1939', in *The Journal of Modern History* (March 1971), 1-41.

32. Both contributed to a conference published as Marcel Déat, *L'Ecole Unique et le problème de la culture* (Paris 1931).